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The Making of "La Gran Familia Mexicana": Eugenics, Gender, and Sexuality in Mexico

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Abstract

This article examines the impact of Mexican eugenics on different programs relating to the family throughout the post-Revolutionary period. It deals with how Mexican elites thought about the family and how these discussions delimited who should be part of or exist under the banner of "la gran familia mexicana". I discuss how eugenicists' debates regarding motherhood, puericulture, class, and different preventive health measures were intended to keep "undesirables"—or the people who, in their view, should not be part of "la gran familia mexicana"—at bay. I argue that science was used as a tool for implementing different eugenic plans that would make ideas of mestizaje and "rational mixing" into the modern Mexican nation. I argue that according to the Mexican Society of Eugenics (MSE), it was through the regulation of individual families and the acceptance of eugenic precept of self-management and rational reproduction that the creation of the national family was to be crafted. Thus, the "gran familia mexicana" would become the organizing principle for both the individual and broader national dynamics in Mexico.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The post-revolutionary conceptualization of *la gran familia mexicana* is very important to the broader understanding of Mexican eugenics. By studying the ways in which Mexican elites thought about the family, this article will address the following questions: what would be the role of women in post-revolutionary Mexico? What did Mexican eugenicists and eugenic science have to say about the care of children, womanhood, masculinity, and feminism? Which were the appropriate eugenic measures to take care of the future of Mexican generations to come? Were sterilization and abortion measures a viable answer to prevent eugenic degeneration? In short, who should, or could be part of *la gran familia mexicana*? I will mainly use the works of Alexandra Minna A. M. Stern (1999, 2000, 2010,

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2011, 2016), Laura Suárez y López Guazo (1999 1999, 2001, 2005, 2009), and Nancy Stepan (1991) as well as the articles produced by members of the Mexican Society of Eugenics (MSE) to guide my quest for *la gran familia mexicana*, processes of belonging, and exclusion.

1.1 | La gran familia mexicana: processes of defining, senses of belonging

Alexandra Minna A. M. Stern (1999) states that after the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), different institutions and state services were dedicated to the reconceptualization of motherhood and puericulture—the care of children—under the banner of *la gran familia mexicana* (A. M. Stern, 1999, p. 375; A. Stern 2000, p. 66). The term *la gran familia mexicana* in fact originated in the nineteenth century as a popular saying that fed different political rhetoric and referred to being naturalized and accepted as a citizen of Mexico. This concept of *la gran familia mexicana* stemmed not only from the processes of naturalization, but also from the fact that most migrants seeking naturalization had already built a life in Mexico and did not have any plans to return to their countries of origin (Pani, 2014, p. 113). This section will explore the idea of the *gran familia mexicana*, on its macro- and micro-levels, as it was defined by Mexican eugenicists.

Eugenicists in Mexico played an important role in the configuration of what they called *profilaxis social* (social prophylaxis). The term social prophylaxis referred to a set of scientific ideas with a program of social implementation, which followed Lamarckian principles of eugenics by arguing that there were certain hereditary precepts that could be controlled or managed. After the Revolution, during the decade of the 1920s, Mexico was undergoing a period of demographic crisis and political upheaval, which presented a singular opportunity for the introduction of eugenic ideas into the new post-revolutionary state. Thus, the rise of eugenics in Mexico stemmed from a perceived need—by the Mexican elites (i.e. medical doctors, educators, anthropologists, members of the MSE, who were mostly male and on the whiter-criollo-spectrum of Mexican society)—to modernize, civilize and reconstruct the nation after the Revolution. Additionally, eugenics seemed like a viable solution as different eugenic programs were already being implemented and used in societies throughout Latin America that were affected by similar problems to those facing Mexico. The Mexican Society of Eugenics (MSE) was created in 1931 by very influential members of the Mexican political, medical, and scientific elite. This allowed the spread of eugenics through different social policies, medical practices, educational campaigns, among other means.

This article will look at the published works of the *Eugenesia* Journal published by the MSE since November 1939 which continued to publish every month—though sometimes every two months—until it slowly stopped publishing in the mid-1950s. The *Eugenesia* journal—which was normally a monthly issue of twenty to twenty-five pages—featured different articles, bibliographic recommendations, medical advertisements, notifications regarding the directives, an editorial section, conference minutes and, in some cases, even games. The adverts were usually targeted at medical professionals by advertising the latest discoveries in medicine, books, and remedies. However, the nature of some of the adverts suggests that this journal was targeted at male medical professionals.

Eugenic ideas were spread by individual theorists like Manuel Gamio (1883-1960) and José Vasconcelos (1882-1959), but the first organized societies that attempted to implement eugenic programs emerged in the late 1920s and 1930s. This caused the gradual spread of eugenic science and thought to be popularized and spread among influential circles, especially in Mexico City. Inspired by Neo-Lamarckism (which was widely used in the work of Gamio), Rafael Carrillo (a professor of the School of Natural Sciences and Medicine) founded the Society of Puericulture in 1929. The term puericulture came from the French Neo-Lamarckian conception of eugenics, and it dealt with maternity, child-bearing practices, the care of children, and hygienic practices. This adaptation of puericulture to the Mexican context was partly due to the strong historical connections that Mexican academia had with France, which allowed the adaptation of theories like Lamarckism to be widely accepted in Mexico as a tool for modernization and progress. However, it was also due to assumed needs to compete with rising world powers—like

the United States—and the fact that it had already proven successful in other Latin American countries like Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, among others. The Society of Puericulture started publishing their own journal entitled the *Mexican Journal of Puericulture* in 1930. By 1931, the Society of Puericulture—which is now the Mexican Society of Pediatrics—had about 130 members and regularly included a eugenics section in their publications (Suarez y López Guazo, 1999a, pp. 51–84, p. 191).

During the decade of the 1920s the political and cultural climate of post-revolutionary Mexico was changing due to the massive migration of young peoples from the rural parts of Mexico to the city (Bliss et al., 2007, p. 210). According to Katherine Bliss and William French (2007) young people aged from 10 to 24 composed about one third of Mexico City's population as it was recorded in the 1921 census (Bliss et al., 2007, p. 2010). The transformation of the city gave way to different ways of living and inhabiting it. These adolescents usually composed part of Mexico City's working class and would spend their wages on 'venues associated in public discourse with sexual permissiveness' (Bliss et al., 2007, p. 210). These adolescents, in the elites' view, were leading a life of degeneration and disease that would jeopardize the future of the Mexican nation. It was in this political and cultural climate that eugenicists came to try to regulate, manage, and control the reproduction of women to construct a family that, in their view, would be free from hereditary defects and the risk of long-term genetic degeneracy.

Eugenics was seen by the Mexican elites as a tool to control this population that was migrating from rural to urban parts of Mexico, regulate their acts of sexual permissiveness, and try to eradicate their erotic sentiments through eugenic measures. The term adolescent came into use in the first decades of the twentieth century by North American and European intellectuals, to divide childhood and adulthood within institutional efforts to separate education, work, leisure activities, and romance with regards to this new social classification (Bliss et al., 2007: pp. 210–211). In the case of Mexico, the usage and institutionalization of adolescence was also eugenically oriented. With the vast migration from rural areas of the country to Mexico City, Mexican eugenicists tried to control the activities of leisure and what they considered to be sexual deviancies among working class adolescents. For instance, eugenicist and physiologist, José Joaquín Izquierdo recommended—at the Second Congress of the Mexican Child in 1923—that it was important to do an exhaustive study of the distribution of *la gran familia mexicana* to determine the defects and characteristics of the unions between the "indian", criollo, and mestizo (A. Stern 2000, p. 66).

The construction of modernity and nation in Mexico, as mestizo, allowed eugenicists to be present in the spread of ideas that would "ameliorate the race"—which was their motto, mentioned in almost all of the issues in the *Eugenesia* journal. Using science and hygiene as a modern technology to civilize, eugenicists ensured that the indigenous body would become culturally an enhanced body; the ideal mestizo. The technological alteration of indigenous bodies through Mexican eugenics would produce "positive changes" for future generations since it would prepare them to be a part of a modern and civilized society (Dalton, 2018, pp. 14–17; Suárez y López Guazo, 1999, p. 63). Thus, the idea of eugenics and mestizaje as a technology can help us surpass the nature/culture dichotomy, exploring "how these scientific and political practices and ideas are elements in a complex assemblage, rather than being two domains of 'science' and 'politics' that interact" (Wade, 2017, p. 2).

Even though mestizaje is sometimes construed through racelessness, it relies on "race" and the possibility of purity. I argue that the logics of mestizaje (Moreno Figueroa, 2006) operated to make possible eugenicists' claims during the early twentieth century as well as their continuation, because of the long history underpinning ideas of mestizaje. The construction of mestizaje comes from a series of practices and meanings that have assembled to offer diverse historical meanings (Wade, 2017, p. 48). By arguing scientifically, socially, and culturally, that the mestizo was to become the archetype for the nation, Mexican elites structured assemblages that produced a slippery dynamic which is sometimes taken for granted.

These racializing assemblages (Weheliye, 2014) that produce the figure of the mestizo as a stable entity generated the conditions for the creation of Juvenile Court's Observation Rooms (1926) made to discipline and reincorporate criminal adolescents into society. Additionally to this, the Juvenile Court System was created in

the 1930s under the Department of Social Provision (A. M. Stern, 1999, p. 386). According to A. M. Stern (1999), the Juvenile Court System was managed by five magistrates, among whom were anthropologist, leading voice of the *indigenismo* movement, and member of the MSE Manuel Gamio and feminist eugenicist Matilde Rodríguez Cabo, who were in charge of the 'discipline and reform predicated on eugenic understandings of heredity, sexuality, and cognitive capacity' (A. M. Stern, 1999, p. 386). Additionally, in the *Eugenesia* Journal there were various mentions of different ways in which eugenicists and Mexican officials could control the working class and, therefore, create and maintain *la gran familia mexicana*. For instance, educator and psychiatrist, Raúl González argued that there was a 'difference in the moral sexuality of the bourgeoisie and the working class' (González Enriquez, 1940, p. 9; Stern, 2006, p. 337; Suarez y López Guazo, 2005, p. 231). González proceeded to argue that there were four main characteristics of the sexual lives of working-class women. These were 'precocious initiation, promiscuity, and fugacity at the time of initiation, lack of a legal marriage, and elevated percentage of clandestine, accidental—which, in this case is synonymous to occasional—, or transient prostitution' (González Enriquez, 1940, p. 9). Eugenically oriented institutions like the Juvenile Court also show a form of assimilated eugenic thinking (N. Rose, 2001) dictated by moral precepts, as these were used by parents to discipline their children by claiming they were engaging in 'prostitution' based on no specific grounds or evidence (Bliss et al., 2007, pp. 209–236). Thus, following N. S. Rose (2007) 'conceptions of the biological basis of national identity and national unity underlay many legal definitions of nationhood and citizenship in terms of descent' (p.138). Hence, these eugenic approaches that tended to advocate for the self-regulation and management of people for the betterment of the nation were very much present in the creation of *la gran familia mexicana*.

It was as a way of contesting these lives of 'degeneration', pleasure, and sexual leisure that eugenicists in conjunction with the Mexican government started to try and implement measures and ideas to control and manage sexuality. For instance, in February 1933, two years after the creation of the MSE, Alfredo Saavedra drew up a Mexican Code of Eugenics. Saavedra, surgeon and professor of the UNAM, served as the first President of the MSE, the Society's Secretary for Life, and the director of the MSE's journal *Eugenesia* (Suárez y López Guazo, 1999, p. 63). Saavedra's Code of Eugenics was mainly directed towards an extensive program of eugenically-oriented sex education that was made in conjunction with radio broadcasts and eugenically oriented pamphlets for popular consumption (Stepan, 1991, p. 57; A. M. Stern 1999, p. 376; Suarez y López Guazo, 1999). The Mexican Code of Eugenics was a series of guidelines that advocated for measures to better the Mexican 'race' and create the conditions to produce the eugenically oriented idea of *la gran familia mexicana*. This code stated that "[i]t [was] not rational to accept that love must be blind" (Saavedra, 1940a, p. 1) alluding to the advocacy of a rational mixing of the Mexican population through puericulture and the prevention of undesirable marital unions. Additionally, this new idea of love contrasted with the typically romantic nineteenth century idea of love to demarcate a new era of rational thinking. This is to say, by advocating for a rational way of reproducing, Saavedra presents eugenic practices and ideas as a modern tool for the nation to escape the irrationality of "love" and—with it—its possible degenerative offspring.

The Code was divided into twelve eugenic precepts:

1. Marriage is the union between two people of the opposite sex that unite in order to form a home in which there is moral, physical, and economic cooperation. This has the end goal of perpetuating the species.
2. Children are the base of solidarity in a marriage. Parents have full responsibility of their offspring.
3. Sick parents, either mentally or physically ill, cannot produce healthy offspring; most of them are insane criminals, blind, and perverted. It would be all the parents' fault if they produce a degenerate offspring as they did not have previous cultural and moral preparation.
4. That alcoholism in general and drugs, even more so before marriage, can damage the life of the offspring and can produce mentally deficient, sick, or perverted children.
5. That venereal diseases, specifically syphilis and gonorrhoea, are direct causes of racial degeneration and the death of children before being born.

6. That marriages between family members cause biologically deficient individuals.
7. If a couple is not completely healthy, they should abstain from sex and not bear any children.
8. One cannot have children if they are not to be born healthy or one cannot teach them the basic principles of hygiene.
9. Abortion is reprehensible for moral and biological reasons.
10. Parents are responsible for knowing the fundamental principles behind childcare before their children are born.
11. Beyond economic, social, or emotional reasons, one needs to pick the best partner rationally. This means choosing out of the best equipped morally and physically.
12. Before marriage, one needs to consult a doctor who will recommend hygienic practices and will do a study of each person to guarantee the best conditions for the future offspring. (Saavedra, 1940a, pp. 1–2)

As it can be seen above, the Mexican Code of Eugenics offered specific guidelines to prepare 'healthy/fit' individuals for reproduction while leaving out people who are seen as 'degenerate/not apt' for the reproduction of the *gran familia mexicana*. There was a concern among eugenicists for 'populating well'. This leads Saavedra to create a series of precepts that found that the best course of action was the rational mixing of those who were considered 'apt', both physically and psychologically, to produce a healthy offspring.

Firstly, it should be noted that—the Code implied—that the heterosexual family was the only one able, according to the MSE, to reproduce the Mexican 'race'. Thus, everything outside of heterosexuality as a norm would have fallen under the eugenicist's rubric of "degeneracy", therefore, pathological and out of the *gran familia mexicana*. During the early 1940s, the MSE published various discussions regarding sexuality; in order to do this, they would quote Austrian neurologist and forefather of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). For instance, on a summary of the 9th Cycle of Conferences made by the MSE, they published a paper presented by neuro-psychiatrist and psychotherapist Guillermo Dávila. In his paper entitled *The Sexual Problems of Infants* (Dávila, 1940, p. 12), Dávila drew on Freud's ideas, specifically on the *Essay of Infantile Sexuality* (Freud, 1905, p. 277–339), to argue that 'pansexuality [began] when a person [was] born and [this had] repercussions on the person's phycological status since homosexuality originally [derived] from narcissism' (Dávila, 1940, pp. 12–13). Dávila used these ideas to argue that homosexuality and developmental problems in the psychological composition of an infant could cause a regression that would lead to neurosis (Dávila, 1940, p. 13). Alluding to Lamarckian conceptions of eugenics, he also argued that the only way that homosexuality could be eradicated would be through censorship and education (Dávila, 1940, p. 13). This censorship was discussed in various essays of the *Eugenesia* journal and it alluded to the censorship of literature, theatres, and art that would contain sexual content as, in the eugenicists view, this would tamper with the developmental composition of children.

Two years after Dávila's paper, José Chelala published an article at the *Eugenesia* journal entitled *The Infantile Psychic Personality and its Influence in Mental Hygiene* (1942). Drawing on Freud's ideas, Chelala argues that if a parent's pathologies tampered with the determining stages of the child this could lead to an abnormal child—which, in this case, is something other than a heterosexual individual whose purpose is to reproduce 'well' (Chelala, 1942, pp. 3–30). Abnormality for Chelala takes various meanings, he presents the cases of several children or adults (recounting their childhood) and their first sexual experiences and sexual encounters. Using the works of Austrian physician and Freudian psychologist Willhelm Stekel (1868-1940) and his own encounters with patients, Chelala discusses six cases that broadly touch upon children's sexuality, the role of parental figures, and its links to Freudian thought. To him, the sexuality of children was tied to the parents and this could lead to feelings of jealousy and intrusive thoughts. However, the abnormal child is produced when the tutelage is left to improvisation and not to "the scientific route" which, according to Chelala, was the best option for the betterment of society and, therefore, the production and maintenance of *la gran familia mexicana* (Chelala, 1942, p. 28).

One of the most important aspects of the Mexican Code of Eugenics is the constant preoccupation with the making of better offspring for the future of the *la gran familia mexicana*—which started to be seen as a pseudonym

for the Mexican nation. Here, the idea of mestizaje was the covert organizing principle that guided the series of rules and instructions for the 'betterment of the race'. The heterosexual production of the mestizo through eugenic guidance was supposed to protect the nation from abnormality. Children became the love object that should be protected from hereditary tares but, simultaneously, it needed to be produced in accordance to the figure of the mestizo that operates as a guiding principle of society. Additionally, while there was no direct mention of 'races' in the code, there is a hidden racial aspect that comes with Saavedra's account of rational love in order to make a better offspring for the future of *la gran familia mexicana*. Saavedra's quest to find the best and rational way to reproduce well was mainly a series of precepts that would lead to a 'good mixing of the races' which would focus on assumed biological and eugenic reasons cemented on the mestizo as the archetypal body of the Mexican nation (Wade, 2017). According to Saavedra, this likeness revolved around a mestizaje that would be imprinted in the skin as a sign of progress and modernity that, in his view, went beyond economic and emotional considerations (Saavedra, 1940a, p. 1).

According to Mexican eugenicists the rational mixing of the population would lead to happy and normal children. Nonetheless, this comes at the expense of the happiness of those heterosexual parental figures that decided to make the eugenically and rational decision to mix for the betterment of mestizaje. Medic and feminist, María de J. Cisneros de S. Hernández, published an article in *Eugenesia* entitled *Repercussions in the Species*: *Children's Sadness* (Cisneros de S. Hernández, 1939, pp. 3–10). Cisneros argued that children were an individual and collective problem that relied on the 'weak hands of women; women-mother or women-teacher' (Cisneros de S. Hernández, 1939, p. 6). This was why she argued that love had to be rational as when 'we rely on disorganized love […] children can fall prey to a complex emotion such as sadness' (Cisneros de S. Hernández, 1939, pp. 6–8). However, in Cisneros view, hereditary problems could be diminished through the individual and collective care of the children as hereditary problems were already an issue which stemmed from the indigenous side of the mix between the "races". In this case individual caretaking entitled both 'reproducing well' and having the eugenic tools to educate children (according to the moral, hygienic, modern and scientific precepts of *la gran familia mexicana*). However, it also meant gravitating state institutions that were also supposed to follow eugenic guidelines like the Department of Psychopedagogy and Hygiene, Child Hygiene Centre, Juvenile Courts, sexual education programs, the institutionalized education system, among others. According to Cisneros and other members of the MSE, the convergence of both institutionalized and individual eugenic thinking and practice would make the *gran* (and happy) *familia mexicana*.

Nonetheless, both the happiness and the creation of the *gran familia mexicana* had racialized meanings that excluded certain bodies from being a part of it. Cisneros stated that indigenous populations were part of 'a race filled with sadness' (Cisneros de S. Hernández, 1939, p. 9)—which was a common depiction of indigenous people in the literature of the time. Thus, Cisneros concluded the article by stating that 'if we [cared] about a better humanity, eugenic considerations [were] needed' (Cisneros de S. Hernández, 1939, p. 10). Thus, there is an underlying idea among eugenicists at the beginning of the twentieth century that tended to go against the nineteenth century ideas of Europeanness as a sign of progress. This made twentieth century intellectuals privilege ideas of racial mixture or mestizaje as a way of producing a 'stronger race'. However, this does not mean that they rejected the underlying assumption that 'race' as a biological type existed; or that there were weaker and stronger, more civilized or barbaric, or progressive and backwards races.

As is seen here, different layers of eugenic practices and ideas were in place alongside the production and preservation of *la gran familia mexicana*. For instance, the Code and different eugenicists discussed, firstly, the gendered aspect that argues that women have the main role in the care of children—with the aid of different eugenically oriented Mexican institutions. Secondly, the mix between the races should be rational so that children are not unhappy, abnormal, or pathological. Thirdly, there is a great attention by eugenicists to the role of the state and the individual in the management of their own pathologies and, lastly; the ways in which the indigenous 'race' is always thought of as pathological—despite it being an important factor to mestizaje. This treatment of indigenous people as a 'factor' for mestizaje possibly relegates them as not-quite or non-human. To summarize, the legal heterosexual union of the family had to be eugenically managed both at an individual and collective level through

Mexican eugenics. Thus, the abovementioned eugenic Code advocated for a rational mixing made by the eugenic self-control of the population, allowing for a desirable mestizaje that would create a cohesive national identity in Mexico through *la gran familia mexicana*.

1.1.1 | Prenuptial certificates and eugenics

The development of eugenics helped to construct the ideal family while pathologizing traits that were considered degenerative. There were different measures that advocated for the eugenic regulation of marriages during the Mexican Revolution, like the creation of the first article requiring medical certification before marriage in 1914 and the Family Restriction Law of 1917. However, it was not until after the Mexican Revolution that these measures started to be more prominent. For instance, during the course of the Sixth Latin American Medical Congress in 1922, prenuptial certificates were 'defended as a solution to depopulation and racial health' (Stepan, 1991, p. 124). This was one of the contributing factors for the creation of a Pan American Office of Eugenics. Latin American eugenicists found support in other eugenic societies such as France and Belgium although these societies argued in a conference in 1926 that a prenuptial examination must be regarded 'as a voluntary and prudential aid to marriage, not as an obligatory impediment to it' (Stepan, 1991, p. 124). In the same year, the Sanitary Code of 1926 declared prenuptial certificates as a requisite for marriage. However, these measures were implemented but not enacted until 1935.

The Prenuptial Certificate Law in decree 1709 of 1935 is central to showing the influence of eugenicists and the MSE in Mexico (Suarez et al., 2001, p. 86; Lisbona-Guillén, 2015, p. 177). Through the drafting of this measure I can observe how liberal policies were modified in Mexico in ways that would favour more interventionist rules after eugenics became a part of official discourse (González Soriano et al., 2009, p. 42). The prenuptial certificate had two main goals, the first one being the prevention and elimination of the spread of syphilis and other incurable diseases. For instance, the Federal Civil Code (1928) mentioned '[a] medical certificate by an official Medical Doctor' (Federal Civil Code, Art.94, Num.4) which implied that the prenuptial certificate had to be regulated by the state as it could only be awarded by an official physician. The Federal Civil Code continued by stating that 'those who are about to contract matrimony [could not] suffer from syphilis, tuberculosis, or any chronic or incurable disease that could be contagious or hereditarian' (Federal Civil Code, 1928, Art.94, Num.4). These regulations had, as its aim, the need for state control over the contagion of diseases that followed Lamarckian ideas of eugenics to act as a social prophylactic. However, this was not the only goal of prenuptial certificates. The other objective of these certificates was to work as a gatekeeper for regulating marital unions in Mexico. By way of example, Uruguayan physician and honorary member of the MSE, Augusto Turenne stated that reproduction should be managed through science as 'this should be the only criterion that supports and controls all activities from official institutions' (Turenne, 1941 1941, p. 17). Thus, this shows the ways in which science was presented as a force for implementing different eugenic plans. Moreover, in the specific case of Mexico, MSE eugenicists wanted to make science a mechanism for political intervention that would reduce mestizophiles' dreams into a modern nation (Saade, 2011, p. 62). This can be seen in the ways in which eugenicists discussed the implementations of measures such as the prenuptial certificate as the rational mixing by the population for future generations. In their view the certificate was 'the first step, made by the individual to have the home that they desire' (Saavedra, 1941, p. 6). Through having the home that Mexican individuals desired by accepting eugenic precepts as a way of self-management, the idea of eugenics, envisioned by the MSE, would become the organizing principle for the family in Mexico. Eugenics in Mexico and the idea of a desirable reproduction impacted state measures like the Sanitary Code (1926), regulations to the Civil Code (1928), and produced other institutional services such as the Hereditary Health Counselling Service (1951) to create desirable future prospects for a modern Mexico.

1.1.2 | Mexican mothers: mujer decente, chica moderna, and India bonita

Similarly to *la gran familia mexicana*, the management of reproduction and the role of women comes from a long history of gendered ideas that date back to colonial times. However, what defines the post-revolutionary period is the ways in which modernity conflates with pre-existing ideas of honourability and purity. Nonetheless, the control of sexuality has always been central to the management of reproduction in Mexico. For instance, in New Spain a man's status in society was dictated by honour and respectability, while a woman's status was supported by ideas of honourability, purity, and shame (Wade, 2009, p. 62). However, conceptions of honourability were also mediated by notions of blood and caste, as only Spanish men and women could be considered honourable. Therefore, among the elites of the time, marriage was central to safeguarding and enhancing the honour and respectability of the wealthy and, more importantly, the family (Vinson III, 2018, p. 125). Nonetheless, it is important to note the legal notion of the family, in colonial New Spain, was conceptualized for safeguarding honour and wealth, rather than something to protect for its own sake.

After the independence of Mexico (1810-1821), Mexican elites were extremely concerned with immorality and the feeling that the value of honour had completely left the nation (Escalante, 1992). This concern continued well into the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. During this period the *mujer urbana* (urban woman) or *chica moderna* (modern girl) was an object of debate by the elites as these conceptions of urban and modernity were, in the latters' view, bringing about immorality and sexual permissiveness (Zavala, 2006, p. 150-152). This led to a rise in academic and scientific works during the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century that discussed the purity and honourability of women. For instance, Mexican scientist Francisco Flores published a book entitled *The Hymen in Mexico* (1885). His interest was showing, through his sample of 181 women, that virginity was a sanitary and hygienic concern. Ruiz (2001) argues that these investigations showed a moral concern for the virginal state and purity of women while making an active effort to frame it as a scientific and anthropological concern for defining nature, biology, and the cultural behaviours of Mexican society (Ruiz, 2001, p. 148). Similarly, Manuel Gamio dedicated an entire chapter of *Forging a Nation* (1916) to women, entitled *Our Women*—which suggested, in a patronizing way, a sense of property. In this chapter he classified and divided women into three categories: servant, feminist, and feminine (Gamio, [1916] 2010, p. 115–125). Gamio argued that feminine women were the most desirable of the three, as they still held notions of honourability and purity that would make for a desirable mixture of the existing races in Mexico. Conversely, in Gamio's view, feminists had masculine traits like modern, short haircuts which contrasted with the traditional long hairstyles of indigenous women who still preserved their traditions of purity and morality (Zavala, 2006, p. 164–165). Additionally, he argued that the newly-independent Mexican state had the 'patriarchal' duty to care for the virginal and pure status of feminine women that was jeopardized in the cases of servant or feminist women. In his view, the latter only wanted to colonize the former (servants) as a way of exerting a colonial-style power within family structures (Ruiz, 2001, p. 149). This refers to a kind of class discourse that insinuated that representations of working-class women followed very different patterns from the Mexican bourgeoisie and working-class men. For instance, Fowler-Salamini (2009) argues that vulnerability was a common topic that intersected representations of working-class women through industrial paternalism, middle-class ideas, and norms of femininity. Eugenicists of the time made use of these vulnerabilities to construct working-class women as a group who is 'in need of saving'(Fowler-Salamini, 2009, p. 272).

Gendered, regional, racial, and class dynamics of honourability, purity, and shame were still present after the Mexican Revolution. However, the Mexican elites made the political decision to modernize the pure and honourable idea of the Mexican woman—or *mujer decente*—while it coexisted with the *chica moderna* (Hershfield, 2008). The differences between them range from the honourability and purity of the *mujer decente* to the *chica moderna* being a figure of progress but sexual permissiveness that was usually ascribed to the city. The figure of the *chica moderna* was produced by the Mexican government, institutions, advertising, and elites through a series of images made to fashion an emergent, national middle-class citizen who would combine notions of purity and honourability with modernity

(Hershfield, 2008, pp. 4–6). However, conflicting ideas of modernity make this notion rather difficult to define. For instance, for people like Manuel Gamio, Mexico's modern woman should also be inherently traditional. This can be seen in the 1921 beauty pageant *La india bonita*. The study of this pageant sheds some light on the gendered notions of racial mixture in post-revolutionary Mexico and the role it plays in the creation of *la gran familia mexicana*.

As I showed at the bottom of Figure 1, Gamio was one of the organizers and part of the jury of the contest. Being one of the organizers of the pageant, he used his own thesis in *Forging a Nation* (1916) to construct a feminine category of woman who was desirable to white Mexican men in order to make a good and rational racial mixture that, in turns, creates the notion of *la gran familia mexicana*. In Gamio's view the *india bonita* pageant was the epitome of authentic Mexican beauty (Zavala, 2006, p. 160). He argued later, in 1923, that Mexico's demographic problems could only be solved by white men mixing with indigenous women as they were intrinsically monogamous (Ruiz, 2001, p. 153). This stems from Mexico's national myth of mestizaje in which the mestizo represents the product an original or foundational mixture between White men and indigenous women, embodied in the figure of Spanish conquistador Hernan Cortés—commonly believed to have caused the fall of the Aztec Empire—and the rape of the Malinche—a Nahua woman who served as an interpreter for Cortés during the initial conquest. It was believed that the first mestizo was born from Malinche's rape by Cortés—embodied in the figure of Martín Cortés. As it can be observed from this, the myth of mestizaje mixes with both reproductive and scientific tropes to produce the future of the *gran familia mexicana*. Additionally, one can infer that the idea of 'rational mixture' is mounted in the mythical tropes that make the mestizo a stable category that, in turn, produces mestizaje logics (Moreno Figueroa, 2010; Wade, 2017; Figure 2)

By portraying the winner of the pageant, María Bibiana Uribe, as a 'pure race meshica indian' Gamio presented her as an exotic indigenous woman with a glorious lineage that could be traced to courageous warriors, making her the ideal woman for mestizaje. Additionally, the idea that someone—in this case an indigenous woman—from within the Mexican nation could be exotic is telling as it places her in contrast with the *chica moderna* who is an acculturated criolla. However, it is important to note that it is the descendants of the criollos who exoticized certain elements of indigeneity 'based on traditional clothing of Mexico's indigenous cultures' (Hershfield, 2008, p. 128). This way of clothing, nonetheless, did not represent 'an authentic representation of the other [in this case indigenous people] but an "aestheticized" construction that might be read as the desire for the other or as a desire to escape from the self into something or someone else' (Hershfield, 2008, p. 130).

Furthermore, instances like *La india bonita* beauty pageant puts into question why indigenous men were not considered ideal for mestizaje. One might infer that this is because making indigenous men the ideal for mestizaje would tamper with a majority criollo elite in Mexico. Additionally, there is an underlying patriarchal logic behind the construction of the mestizo as the archetype of the nation which converges with racialization processes and racial domination. In this case gender and 'race' operate as organizing principles of society that hierarchize bodies that escape white-criollo masculinity. Moreover, the idea of an '*india bonita*' pageant also suggests that indigenous women were inherently seen as 'not beautiful'. Thus, Mexican ideas of beauty allow the study of the different ways in which beauty can enhance understandings of the different 'mechanism of racism in Mexico' and it also shows the ways in which a light skinned mestizo is often privileged in Mexican society (Moreno Figueroa et al., 2010). Thus, in the case of *La india bonita* pageant, whiteness operates as a 'core-structuring motif obscured by the homogenizing racial logic of mestizaje' (Moreno Figueroa et al., 2010, p. 388) to create *la gran familia mexicana*.

The visualization of what the new modern woman of Mexico entailed, according to national values and precepts, gave a sense of empowerment that simultaneously positioned women as not only modern, but as a reproductive apparatus for the future of Mexico and the composition of *la gran familia mexicana* (Hershfield, 2008; A. M. Stern, 2010). This paradox of the role of Mexican women as an empowered subject while also being the holder of biological burden for the future of the nation is a constitutive element of the way in which eugenics and Mexican nationalism was carried out (A. M. Stern, 2010, p. 174). Additionally, gendered ideas of the different roles of men and women in society work as an organizing principle for eugenic ideas on "race", class, beauty, among others that converge in the creation of *la gran familia mexicana*.

FIGURE 1 The Jury for the Contest: *La india bonita* Taken from: (El Universal Ilustrado, 1921 in Albarrán Samaniego, 2018, p. 5)

1.1.3 | Mexican fathers: an absent presence?

The role of men in Mexico is somewhat absent from raising children and caregiving. Eugenicists in Mexico believed that men should be, above all, sober, industrious, and clean. However, it was women who were often charged with the job of keeping men away from alcoholism instead of appealing directly to the responsibility of men. Alfredo Saavedra argued that, despite supporting the role of women's empowerment and the *chica moderna*, it was important to keep a traditional patriarchal structure in Mexico. For instance, one can observe the paradoxical elements of Mexican eugenics between the figure of the *chica moderna* and *mujer decente* when Saavedra argued that the "first step of female liberation, motivated by the incentive of the species, [entailed] not worrying about the interests of the father" (A. M. Stern, 1999, p. 377). For Saavedra, the roles of men and women were dictated by biology. In his view 'women had to be fundamentally feminine and men had to be essentially masculine with all the attributes and obligations that emerge from their somatic constitution' (Saavedra, 1940b, p. 19). Thus, in this section we will observe the ways in which eugenicists made use of biological and anatomical conceptions to support changing political and social conventions (Preciado, 2016, p. 408).

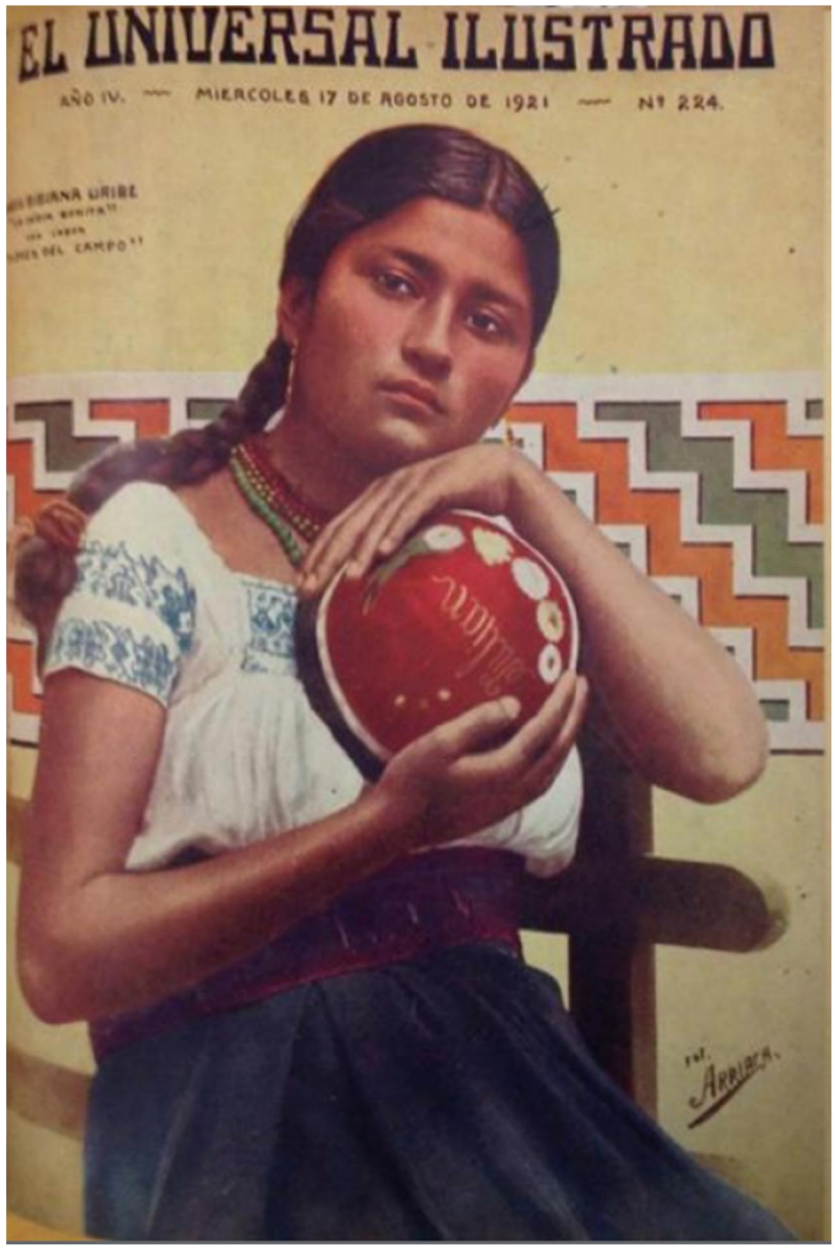

FIGURE 2 Winner of *La india bonita*, María Bibiana Uribe, 16 years old (Taken from: El Universal Ilustrado, 1921) [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Similarly to Gamio, femininity, in Saavedra's view, had to do with caregiving and purity while following modern eugenic precepts of reproduction. For instance, this is shown in the different covers of *Eugenesia*.

Figure 3 shows the ways in which the role of women is relegated to caregiving and reproduction. Additionally, the majority of the images show non-indigenous women and white babies which I suggest that could either reflect internal tensions between different members of the MSE that dictated whose bodies should be part of the nation, or it possibly portrayed something to strive for, a light-skinned mestizo, or—lastly—it could have also reflected the same pattern of white dominance in images that dominated advertising and popular culture at the time and, in a

FIGURE 3 *Eugenesia* Covers, December 1941 (top-left), February 1941 (top-right), September 1941 (bottom-left), July 1950 (bottom-right) [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

sense, still do. Nonetheless, the gender roles depicted by the MSE show a socialization and relegation of women to caregiving.

As shown in Figure 4, the girl is already taking care of an infant which shows the processes and early-socialization of gender roles, advocated by Mexican eugenicists in society.

Saavedra's idea of being 'essentially masculine' was opposed with vagrancy, alcoholism, and delinquency, which were traits considered by eugenicists as generally unproductive to Mexican society. To eugenicists, men were discussed very differently from women. In this sense, reproduction was discussed more in its relation to maternity. Thus, womanhood was dominated by its relationship with maternity in a way that manhood was not. Nonetheless, this should not mean that manhood was not important to reproduction as—in the eugenicists' views—a degenerate father was likely to produce degenerate offspring. However, it was mostly up to the women to find a suitable partner to reproduce, which means that the eugenic 'happiness' (by achieving a rational reproduction to create *la gran familia mexicana*) was applicable to children and possibly to men but never to women. This is why Saavedra proceeded to explain the role of women in society by stating that 'the fundamental mission of women [was] motherhood, but it [could] also derive to other functions of caregiving within society such as education (i.e. teachers) and social work' (Saavedra, 1940b, p. 20). Thus, both the responsibility of caregiving and eugenically finding a suitable partner was always relegated to women.

The need for 'new men' in the twentieth century was a very common rhetoric among eugenicists that can be seen replicated in Mexico (A. M. Stern, 2010, p. 180). In the case of Mexico, most male eugenicists were upper or

FIGURE 4 *Eugenesia* Cover, January 1948 [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

middle class who not only were active participants in the Revolution—as policy makers, drafters of the constitution, soldiers, among others—but who also positioned themselves as the best subjects for reproduction due to their superior lineage vis-à-vis the working class. For instance, A. M. Stern (2010) mentions that in 1921 at the Second International Congress of Eugenics in New York City, Mexican psychologist José Joaquín Izquierdo (1893-1974) presented his family tree which dated his lineage back to Spanish conquistadors (A. M. Stern, 2010, pp. 179–180). By showing his family tree, Izquierdo showed a preference for his European ancestry portraying himself as the outcome of his white forefathers that, in Izquierdo's view, were soldiers and conquistadors of new civilizations. Thus, as A. M. Stern (2010) argues, the 'brand of colonizer masculinity was integral to eugenics' (A. M. Stern, 2010, p. 180). Nonetheless, there are different ideas of masculinity in the Mexican contexts. This is why Wade (2017) argues that these notions probably stemmed from the fact that in some Latin American contexts the white creole upper-middle class men came to be seen as effeminate—by revolutionaries—, while the mestizos became the new model of masculine virility (Wade, 2017, p. 201). Additionally, I suggest that this is also an attempt to show one's

masculine qualities 'despite' whiteness. Similarly, in this context intellect and rationality were still thought to be stronger traits in European descendants, whereas the type of 'virility' that suggested bravery and strength might be more closely associated with mestizos. Nonetheless, in an attempt to break away from these conceptions of femininity and showing their qualities, white upper-middle class men started advocating for a pragmatic way of 'bettering' the population and inserting themselves as suitable to the creation of *la gran familia mexicana*. Thus, on the one hand, this brand of colonizer masculinity not only stems from a gendered and racializing principle but, in the case of Mexico, is simultaneously used as a class marker to differentiate white or light-skinned upper or upper-middle class from the rural to urban migration of working-class adolescents that, in the elites' view, were tied to degeneration, vices, vagrancy, and disease. On the other hand, the example of *La india bonita* pageant shows how people like Gamio felt the need to make indigenous women desirable to white men that started to look for pragmatic ways to integrate and change the desired mestizaje of post-revolutionary Mexico.

1.1.4 | Healthy families, happy children

The control and management of children played an important part in eugenic discussions. However, since the Porfiriato (period) there were different measures to standardize and medicalize the education system in Mexico. For instance, in 1908 the Department of the School of Anthropometrics and eugenicists Daniel Vergara Lope and Everando Landa investigated the 'physiological averages of Mexican children from birth until the age of 24 years' (A. M. Stern, 1999, p. 383). This was done to gather data on the children's height, weight, and thoracic width in order to create an average of intelligence and mental normalcy (A. M. Stern, 1999, p. 383). Additionally, in 1910, José de Jesús Gonzalez stipulated the bases for separating 'retardation' and 'normalcy' through a series of categories like "false from true retards, educable from non-educable abnormals, imbeciles from simple retards, moral abnormals from mental cases, and so on" (A. M. Stern, 1999, pp. 383–384).

After the Revolution these ideas set the bases for the creation of different eugenically-oriented institutions to catalogue and construct an average for children. For instance, in 1922 the Child Hygiene Centre was created and in 1925 the Department of Psychopedagogy and Hygiene (DPH) was founded. By 1926, the DPH administered exams to over 15,000 pupils, seeking to determine levels of mental retardation (A. M. Stern, 1999, p. 384). As a result, by the early 1930s between 90,000 and 200,000 students were being tested in Mexico per year and by 1935 and 1936 the DPH was directing and organizing workshops to instruct school teachers in places like Michoacán, Guerrero, and Mexico City (A. M. Stern, 1999, p. 385). Additionally, during the 1930s the state created a Juvenile Court System that was overseen by the Department of Social Provision and the Child Hygiene Services (A. M. Stern, 1999, pp. 386-387; Bliss et al., 2007). I argue that besides the individual eugenic self-management of the populations these institutions were created as a way of regulating and controlling *la gran familia mexicana*.

Eugenicists counted these measures as an achievement for advancing a eugenic agenda in Mexico. They argued that the measures taken by the state would go hand in hand with the role of the mother outside of these institutions. For instance, eugenicist Cisneros de S. Hernández argued in an article in *Eugenesia* that if children were not given the appropriate care they would become "problem children", which would make them a collective issue. Hernández stated that 'problem children [stopped] being an individual problem and [became] a social problem […] and this issue not only [rested] on the hands of the state but also on the hands of medical doctors, paediatricians, and researchers; but, overall, these problems [fell] on the weak hands of women and particularly the woman-mother and the woman-teacher' (Cisneros de S. Hernández, 1939, p. 8). Thus, women were entrusted with childcare but only to a point in the development of children. This suggests that the state became the equivalent of a father figure in the Mexican family (Olcott, Vaughan, & Cano, 2006). A similar point was argued by eugenicist José Torre Blanco (1895-1987), a Spanish obstetrician and gynaecologist exiled to Mexico in April 1939 due to the Spanish Civil War. By 1953, he revalidated his title in Mexico and became chief of the obstetric and gynaecological section of the Sanatorium for Education Workers and the 20 de Noviembre Hospital. Beyond his medical practice, Torre

Blanco was also a founding member of the Mexican Society of Gynaecology and Obstetrics and an active member of the MSE. At the 16th Conference Cycle of the MSE he presented a paper entitled *Instinctive, Affective, or Rational Maternity* (1944) in which he claimed that 'eugenics had the fundamental responsibility of making a conscious, healthy, and responsible family' (Torre Blanco, 1945, p. 11). Nonetheless, this responsibility for the family was mainly part of the role of women as he stated that 'woman as a biological representative of her sex, due to her biology, and social situation cannot develop any activities capable of damaging herself, the working class, or society in general' (Torre Blanco, 1945, p. 8). Thus, the construction of the *gran familia mexicana* relied on the rationality of women to make the 'right' or eugenically oriented decisions for the betterment of Mexican society. However, the capability of women to make these decisions is constantly doubted by governmental officials and eugenicists that advocated for the requirement, alongside the role of women as caretakers, of different governmental apparatuses and institutions to regulate the *gran familia mexicana*.

In 1916, Mexican feminists held two conferences in Yucatán in which they used the label 'eugenic feminism'. This was a popular term among the suffragette movement in Britain and was used by Margaret Sanger in the United States and India to advocate for birth control, which was mostly based on Weismannian theories that differed from Lamarckian ideas in that they did not consider environmental conditions to be relevant when studying heredity (A. M. Stern, 1999, pp. 377–378; Nadkarni, 2014, p. 1). I argue that Mexican elites possibly felt an anxiety regarding their own population by looking at it as 'racially disadvantaged' vis-à-vis North Americans and Europeans. Hence, they were therefore keener to accept Lamarckian eugenics because it left more room for 'hoping' that changing the environment would still allow for 'racial improvement'.

In Mexico, feminist campaigners, who were mostly upper or middle class, used eugenic feminism to refer to the preferable reproduction of a desirable mestizaje and the control of the working classes or 'la prole'. Additionally, at the Mexican Congress of the Child in 1921, the feminists of the time discussed different measures for childcare and puericulture—typically neo-Lamarckian ideas. However, in this same congress different feminist eugenicists advocated for the eugenic sterilization of criminals—who were thought of as afflicted by a hereditary disease—which, in their view, would damage or degenerate mestizaje based on Weismannian ideas (as, in their view, criminality was something imprinted in the genetic composition of the individual) and eugenic feminism. Thus, to eugenic feminists of the time the best course of action to eradicate criminality in Mexico, was to sterilize and eugenically deter those individuals with criminal hereditary traits from reproducing. Thus, through these examples it can be observed that neo-Lamarckian and Weismannian ideas were present in Mexican eugenic discourse—as well as among feminists and patriarchal scientists—during the 1920s as a way to control the reproduction of the working classes. However, I argue that this does not pose a contradiction, firstly, because of the transnational nature of eugenics and, secondly, because feminists in favour of eugenics probably deemed criminality as something 'beyond repair'.

The duality of eugenics between giving the women a sense of empowerment, belonging, and citizenship while technologizing them as reproductive apparatuses for the future of the nation created a paradoxical fissure in the ways in which feminists discussed eugenics. When the MSE was created in 1931 it created internal disputes with the existing Society of Puericulture, mostly between feminists—who were women, members of the MSE—and male members of the Society of Puericulture, who 'dominated the world of paediatrics' (A. M. Stern, 1999, pp. 374-375). For instance, as mentioned above, people like Manuel Gamio did not believe that feminism or feminists were the ideal stand-point or ideological framework for Mexican women; to him, this was an imported ideology that nothing had to do with Mexico's context (Ruiz, 2001; Zavala, 2006). Thus, feminist eugenicists were trying to carve out their space in a male-dominated discipline like puericulture.

The feminist and eugenicist Antonia Ursúa provides an example of these dynamics among eugenicists. She was a prominent obstetrician who not only attended the First Mexican Congress of the Child but was also the co-founder of the National League of Women (A. M. Stern, 1999, p. 376). In the sixth conference made by the MSE and then published by the *Eugenesia* journal in its March 1940 issue, Ursúa presented a paper entitled *Eugenic Matrimony* (1940) in which she expressed that women needed eugenic education to eradicate their 'erotic

sentiment.' This in turn would allow women to 'sublimate erotic sentiment' while achieving 'normal reproductive function' (Ursúa, 1940, p. 19). In Ursúa's view a normal reproductive function entailed giving way to a eugenic and rational mixing to stop genetic degeneration and achieve a better outcome for future generations. Ursúa 'envisioned autonomous women producing a biologically fit society in which children were placed in civilizing institutions' through the power of education (A. M. Stern, 1999, p. 376)—which formed an integral part of puericultural and neo-Lamarckian ideas. Meanwhile, Ursúa also quoted the Galtonian and Weismannian notion of the 'germ plasm' to explain 'the inexorable laws of heredity and the marvellous force of the environment' (A. M. Stern, 1999, p. 376). Ursúa used Galtonian, Lamarckian, and Weismannian ideas to explain that puericulture and eugenic education should be employed to eradicate the 'erotic sentiment' of working-class women—as it was believed by eugenicists that it was women who were more susceptible to sexual perversions. This eroticism referred to the irrational sexual permissiveness of women without state and eugenic control in the cases in which heredity could still be controlled for the betterment of *la gran familia mexicana*. However, it is important to mention that although Galtonian and Weismannian ideas were invoked, the majority of the time they were not put into practice. Thus, Ursúa ended up using a Lamarckian approach when she concluded that eugenics was a form of women's autonomy and empowerment, in the sense that it gave women the capacity of eugenically self-managing and controlling her sexual partners for an ideal reproduction, while enforcing the idea of women as reproductive machines for the future of the Mexican nation (A. M. Stern, 1999, p. 376).

The statements made by Saavedra condemning abortion in point number nine of the Code of Eugenics did not arrive in a vacuum. Different mentions of abortion had been made since the end of the nineteenth century. For instance, the Penal Code of 1871 authorized abortion in cases in which the health of the mother could be endangered (Urías Horcasitas, 2007, p. 149). Moreover, during the first decades of the twentieth century there were various medical debates and academic theses that discussed the role of the state in abortion practices. These debates held moral, social, and biological discourses that did not take into account specific cases as in most of the eugenicists' view the biological function of women was to procreate. This is why, in the MSE's view it was more favourable to sterilize as a form of prevention than to opt for abortion as this measure was seen as an indicator of social degeneration (Urías Horcasitas, 2007, p. 151). For instance, Urías Horcasitas describes a thesis written in 1933 by Alfredo Islas Hernández that advocated for the eugenic sterilization of alcoholics, addicts, feebleminded, and people with syphilis, leprosy, cancer, among others (Urías Horcasitas, 2007, p. 155).Thus, the MSE would still follow some of the Catholic Church's precepts by stating, in point nine of the code, that it was immoral and criminal to perform an abortion. However, these moral discourses were employed while using scientific and demographic language to support it, since the MSE argued that it did not go in accordance to their view to simply populate but to populate well as 'the social good should be over any other conveniences' (Saavedra, 1940b, p. 1).

Besides medical doctors, there were other individuals (some of them eugenicists) whose profession was in the legal branch of the government—like lawyers and legislators—who were interested in abortion—despite the seemingly common consensus among MSE members at the *Eugenesia* journal. They argued that criminal abortion was the first step toward immoral behaviours in women (Urías Horcasitas, 2007, p. 154). However Urías Horcasitas (2007) points out that in a thesis presented at the Faculty of Medicine in 1920, medic and lawyer Joaquín García Santaella stated that the majority of women seeking for an abortion were middle or upper class women looking to preserve their honour while working class women would wait and commit infanticide (Urías Horcasitas, 2007, p. 154). Through García's thesis we can observe how there was a double standard when it came to discuss the morality of women in relation to abortion that was intersected by pre-existing ideas about class. Despite the MSE having those same reservations when it came to class, it is important to note that eugenicists main concern was not abortion but to procreate well/rationally and care for, supervise, and protect the nation's children. With this, the main goal of the majority of the members of the MSE was to create the figure of *la gran familia mexicana* as an exemplar trope for the nation.

By the same year that the Code of Eugenics was drafted, the Department of Public Health decreed that medical doctors had to have a private registry of patients who had different venereal diseases that could be hazardous for

future generations without performing abortions (Urías Horcasitas, 2007, p. 153). Additionally, medical doctors had to notify authorities immediately if these people affected by venereal diseases stopped their treatment (Urías Horcasitas, 2007, p. 153). This is why, in the Mexican eugenicists' view, 'the purpose of eugenics was not to restrict birth-rate, but it [was] obligatory to select those who [were] going to populate Mexico because it [would] be useless to populate with individuals who [were] going to be a burden to the state' (Saavedra, 1945, p.14). The goal of eugenics was not particularly to restrict population growth, rather, they were looking to create a healthy Mexican nation or *familia mexicana*. Hence the burden of the role of the *mujer decente* was to conform to the idea of a virginal and pure reproductive machine for eugenically better offspring.

As it is seen from these sections the *gran familia mexicana* holds many contradictions. However, it is important to note the ways in which the contrast between the role of women was dictated by eugenics as the defining element of modernity or *la chica moderna* while holding onto the values of honourability and purity that made the *mujer decente*. These gender roles were already manufactured over long periods of time however they were eugenically tailored to operate as a guide to ensure the eugenic self-management of individuals to produce the best mixture of the 'races' for the collective Mexican nation in which the state would act as a paternal figure. This is operationalized by eugenicists due to the mostly absent symbolic figure of the biological, preferably white, father and the management of the collective offspring through different measures and institutions (i.e. education). Now that an idea of who are the desirable subjects for the reproduction of Mexico is formed by eugenically oriented measures and conceptions of purity, honourability, modernity, and masculinity one question is left unanswered; who are the people who were not allowed to reproduce? Which hereditary traits were eugenicists trying to 'weed out' (Mottier et al., 2006)?

1.2 | Who is outside "la gran familia mexicana"?

Eugenics was not only concerned with a monolithic conception of 'race' as the MSE combined class, illness, disease, 'race', heredity, and biology, among other traits. For instance, in the Code, Saavedra also stated that any bodies and traits constructed by eugenics as pathological (feeblemindedness, homosexuality, criminality, among others) should not be allowed to reproduce, as they constituted a threat to the future of *la gran familia mexicana*. In the cases of feeblemindedness, alcoholism, homosexuality, and criminality, eugenicists thought that these 'defects' could be genetically inherited. Therefore, they could not be part of the rational mixture of future generations to come as in their view 'the true wealth of a country relies on its ethnologic value' (Saavedra, 1941, pp. 11-12). In this case Saavedra refers to ethnologic value as 'the quality of its inhabitants as the true wealth relies in their health and mental capacity' (Saavedra, 1941, p. 14)—which suggests a value in both social groups as well as culture. Additionally, by drafting this code, Saavedra managed to bring to the fore other issues that, in his view, constituted sanitary concerns like the condemning of abortion and prostitution (Bailón Vázquez, 2016). In this section I will start by discussing the role of sex work according to eugenicists and then I will discuss who were those individuals who did not belong to the *gran familia Mexicana* and, therefore, should be sterilized or volunteer to get sterilized.

1.2.1 | Prostitution in Mexico: from the Sistema Reglamentarista to the Eugenic advocacy for abolition

Saavedra pathologized sex workers and portrayed them as the main culprits for the spread of syphilis in Mexico. He characterized them as not apt for the reproduction of the nation and, therefore, to be part of *la gran familia mexicana* due to their hereditary degeneracy produced by the *Sistema Reglamentarista* (System of Rule) (1862-1940)

which allowed sex-work to be legal until the abolition of prostitution in 1940, which the MSE claimed to have a vast role in bringing about.

From 1862 to 1940 prostitution in Mexico was tolerated under what was called the *Sistema Reglamentarista* (The System of Rule). Even though there had been projects and meetings to regulate prostitution since 1851, it was not until 1862 with the First Regulation for Prostitution at the Federal District that the first official rule was created. This was amended and renewed in 1865, 1868, 1871, 1898, 1914 and 1926 (Bailón Vásquez, 2016, p. 50). The three main rules in the 'regulation of prostitution' made the police responsible for keeping track of sex workers' identities, in order to differentiate them from *las mujeres decentes* or *las mujeres honradas*—which was a term used by legislators and eugenicists alike. Thus, during the *Sistema Reglamentarista* sex workers were thought of as an effective way of containing the natural depravity of men and redirected to sex workers. In this sense, sex workers were thought of as a 'necessary evil' to protect *la gran familia mexicana*.

According to the regulation of prostitution, sex workers had to go through weekly medical check-ups. Additionally, they had to be within the *zonas de tolerancia* (tolerance zones) and were also divided into categories which allowed the state to charge them different fees depending on the type of work that they did and where those actions took place. In addition, if sex workers were caught working outside of the regulations established, they would be fined. According to the last amendment of the *Sistema Reglamentarista* in 1926, there were three main groups in to which sex workers were categorized, depending on the types of activities they engaged in: *las asociadas* (the associated), *las aisladas* (the isolated) and *las clandestinas* (the clandestine) (Meneses Reyes, 2011, p. 57). According to Rodrigo Meneses Reyes (2011), sex workers had to be older than 18 years old but younger than 50 in order to exercise their profession; they were not allowed to be virgins—as this would tamper with the idea of *mujer decente*—and they were expected to display an adequate level of discernment to understand the significance of their actions as they engaged in their professional activities (Meneses Reyes, 2011, p. 57).

Prostitution in Mexico was seen by eugenicists as the main cause for the spread of veneral diseases and the culprits of degeneration for generations to come. In the eugenicists view, having a state that allowed sex work tampered with their eugenic conception of *la gran familia mexicana*. During the first decades of the twentieth century eugenicists, feminist groups, politicians, and different sectors of the Mexican elite were calling for the abolition of the *Sistema Reglamentarista*. However, in the views of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century elites, the regulation of prostitution was perceived to be 'the only measure to prevent or decrease the negative effects of venereal diseases within society' (Bailón Vásquez, 2016, p. 43). However, under President Cárdenas (1934-1940), a new form of government was implemented that advocated for 'social welfare programs.' These paternalistic forms of government created a space in which the Mexican feminist movement could articulate its views on the *Sistema Reglamentarista* as perverse and immoral which, in turn, portrayed sex workers as victims of the system (Bailón Vásquez, 2016, p. 136). Thus, from looking at the figure of the sex worker as a 'necessary evil' for the maintenance of the *gran familia mexicana*, eugenicists and feminists started to see sex workers as victims of a depraved state. This, in their view, not only affected the individual that engaged in sex work but also the *gran familia* as it would constitute the collective contagion of the population from venereal diseases.

Eugenicists also used this discourse of victimhood to refer to working class women who 'fell prey' to prostitution, in order to advocate for its abolition. For instance, in their issue of February 1940, the *Eugenesia* journal dedicated the entire editorial section to a chronological account of achievements made, to celebrate the abolition of prostitution by stating that:

> Our ongoing aims to transform the official concepts about the regulation of prostitution found an echo and the legal chambers approved the new legislation proposed by the Public Health department about the regulation and the relation with the anti-venereal fight. (Saavedra, 1940c, p. 3)

In this section they claimed that the MSE had been advocating for the abolition of prostitution since 1933, when they held a conference on the topic at the National Athenaeum for the Arts and Sciences in Mexico. At the

conference they claimed to have stated that the MSE fought the venereal problem behind prostitution, arguing that they 'discussed the official term fallen woman, [as they] fought for her freedom, dignity, and modesty' (Saavedra, 1940c, p. 1). Then the MSE proceeded to blame the government for the immorality of the Mexican state. From this quotation we can see the ways in which the MSE used Biblical semantics to portray sex workers as fallen women and victims that needed to be rescued from the immorality of the state. Thus, in their view, sex workers could have a way of redemption to the path of becoming part of *la gran familia mexicana* as long as they accept and follow their eugenic precepts.

Despite sex workers being portrayed as victims of the system or culprits, this was not always the way in which sex workers decided to portray themselves. There are various instances of sex workers who made use of the discourse of victimhood employed by the elites to advance their own agendas. Katherine Bliss et al. (2001) state that in the 1920s a group of sex workers, who referred to themselves as the 'daughters of disgrace', 'wrote to Mexican president Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1928) to complain about the laws that governed the practice of sexual commerce in the nation's largest city, they defined themselves as "nationalists" who were concerned for Mexico's welfare' (Bliss, 2001, p. 1). According to Bliss, the 'daughters of disgrace' also complained about external prostitution and human trafficking, deeming it to be non-revolutionary and non-nationalistic, given that it allowed for immoral practices from the outside. By defining themselves as the 'daughters of disgrace,' these women were clearly seeking to portray themselves as defenceless victims who deserved the state's protection, could be redeemed of their 'disgrace' as 'fallen women,' and had the right to participate fully in revolutionary society' (Bliss, 2001, p. 4). Thus, one could infer that the discourses produced from the top-down were being employed as a way of furthering the sex workers' own agendas while showing the importance of their role in the *gran familia mexicana*.

Besides the daughters of disgrace, there are various instances of resistance within sex workers. For example, in 1937, the Anti-venereal Campaign, composed by eugenicists, feminists, and politicians alike, convened a meeting with different members of the Legislative Power to discuss and design a new rule regarding prostitution. By 1938, a new and more restrictive rule was implemented to stop prostitution in different zones of Mexico City, thus causing the closure of numerous brothels. After these new restrictive measures were implemented, sex workers decided to organize with their *matronas* or madams—most of whom were women (at this point)— to question and reverse this new rule. This union between sex workers and *matronas* was so strong that during the first 15 months of the new rule, the National Supreme Court of Justice had to intervene. According to Fabiola Bailón Vazquez (2016), not only did these women complain, protest, and lobby—as a consequence of the new restriction of their functions—but they also demanded a new space for sex work. They underlined that their activities contributed economically to the government's treasury, and so they called to be treated equally, as beneficiaries of the freedom of labour stipulated in Article 4 of the Mexican constitution (Bailón Vásquez, 2016, p. 141). Sex workers and *matronas* created a union in which they advocated for the continuation of prostitution. They also lobbied for a new zone for prostitution, a hospital, and a pension for women who were sex workers but, because of their age, could not continue to work (Bailón Vásquez, 2016, pp. 141–142). Even though the pension and hospital were not created, the Health Department in Mexico City decided to keep the 'tolerance zones'. While striking for their demands for working rights, sex workers also used the narrative of the *mujer decente* to their advantage, claiming that thanks to the existence of prostitution, the *mujeres decentes* were kept at a distance from men's moral flaws and immoral dalliances. Hence, it can be inferred that sex workers believed that it was through their activities that the *gran familia mexicana* could be maintained.

Even though the abolition of prostitution was in force from the 1940s onwards and the publication of articles regarding this topic in *Eugenesia* became less frequent, they did not cease completely. Prostitution in itself did not stop either after the 1940s; rather, it drifted and dispersed to places outside the governmental gaze. Moreover, the idea that the MSE were singlehandedly responsible for achieving the abolition of prostitution needs qualifying; in fact, the abolition of prostitution was approved mostly due to international pressure. This is mainly because the United States wanted to control and regulate the spread of syphilis in Mexico since US soldiers were crossing the border to engage the services of Mexican sex workers. However,

even after abolition, the practice of prostitution continued as police officials received bribes from both madams and pimps, and sex work persisted outside of governmental regulation (Bailón Vázquez, 2016, p. 160). The MSE was conscious of this. For instance, José Benavides, one of the members of the MSE, argued that the abolition rule was insufficient from a sanitation and public health perspective as the *Sistema Reglamentarista*, in a sense, still existed outside of policy (Benavides, 1943, p. 8).

1.2.2 | Sterilization of undesirables or individual choice?

Eugenicists dedicated entire sections and articles in *Eugenesia* and the *Mexican Journal of Puericulture* to discussing the possibility of sterilization measures in Mexico. For instance, eugenicist Rafael Carrillo advocated, in the *Mexican Journal of Puericulture* in 1933, for the idea of responsible motherhood which in some cases meant that women had the responsibility to avoid getting pregnant (A. M. Stern, 1999, p. 375). In his article entitled *The Social and Medical Aspects of a Conscious Maternity* (1933) he insinuated the need for forced sterilization of women who were viewed as defective (A. M. Stern, 1999, p. 375). However, this was not the only case of discussions of sterilization in Mexico. In the *Eugenesia* journal, eugenicists framed sterilization as an economic measure that would benefit the Mexican welfare state. For instance, Ernesto Frenk argued in his article entitled *Eugenic Sterilization* (1940) that it was important to 'impede the procreation of undesirable subjects due to their hereditary problems, mental defects, or transmission of alcoholism' (Frenk, 1940, pp. 16–17, p. 16). To Frenk it was necessary to prevent undesirables from reproducing as 'the amount of energy and money wasted by society [was] due to the harmful descendance of these subjects' (Frenk, 1940, pp. 16–17, p. 16). This, in turn, caused 'unnecessary expenditures to sustain undesirables for their happiness at the expenses of the moral ruin of their families and it [was] because of this that the healthy population [had] to restrict them from being born' (Frenk, 1940, pp. 16–17, p. 16). Thus, according to the MSE a healthy family did not necessarily have to mean having happy parents since the most important issue at stake was the rational mixing of desirable subjects. However, as it was mentioned in the above section, rational mixing was sustained by pre-existing myths and notions that supported the mixture of 'able' white Mexican men and indigenous women. The consequence of this was a *gran familia mexicana* that followed exclusionary and pathologizing measures that either semantically erased bodies that fell outside mestizaje (i.e. Black Mexicans) or suggested that they should make the eugenically right and rational choice to stop reproducing. Thus, as stated in the previous section, eugenicists thought that it was necessary to have a rational mixing—despite the parent's happiness (especially the mother)—to avoid producing *niños tristes* (sad children). This is to say the *gran familia mexicana* relied, in most part, on the unhappiness of the parental figures and the erasure of those who did 'not belong' to achieve a rational and eugenic nation.

Stepan (1991) used the term preventive eugenics to refer to the ways in which eugenics was carried out in Latin America. However, preventive eugenics in Mexico was also used to advocate for the sterilization of undesirables. Using Lamarckian ideas of eugenics, the MSE's editorial section of July 1940 expressed that 'preventive measures have to take into account the study of the hereditary personality exposed to environmental factors, intoxication, insalubrious homes, education, domestic and social organizations, labour conditions, and vagrancy' (Saavedra, 1940d, p. 2). After expressing that environmental conditions tended to impact the hereditary composition of a person it stated that criminals or delinquents should be treated as patients, rather than merely delinquents, due to their genetic and hereditary disease. Putting the delinquents inside of the medical system, Mexican eugenicists sought to control them by pathologizing them. Thus, in the eugenicists' view, measures needed to be taken into account to stop the spread of undesirable traits. It was mentioned by Saavedra that 'the death penalty [was] too radical, but it could be effective in some cases, like when it [was] a chronic pathology' (Saavedra, 1940d, p. 2). Nonetheless, to Saavedra, 'eugenic sterilization [was] the best preventive measure' (Saavedra, 1940d, p. 2). Additionally, various eugenicists saw the United States as an example worthy of following when it came to eugenic implementation. For example, Francisco Peña Trejo, an honorary member of the MSE based in El

Salvador, showed the way that eugenics was being carried out in the United States as an aspirational example. Peña Trejo stated that 'while all the best laws are obligatory, registers show [in the United States] that most cases have had the consent and moral help of the family of the patient. However, there is also a great number of compulsory and involuntary cases' (Peña Trejo, 1940, p. 10). As we can see, Peña Trejo believed that sterilization was the best preventive eugenic measure for those who carried undesirable traits. Moreover, Peña Trejo's thought that citizens could internalize eugenic principles and volunteer family members for sterilization 'of their own accord', for the benefit of the *gran familia mexicana*. In his view, sterilization was the tool or back-up measure, but eugenic thinking was the truly ideal and revolutionary aspect of the program. From Peña Trejo's writing it can be inferred that ideally, people would simply use the Eugenic Code to decide who to marry, or whether to simply eliminate themselves from the *gran familia mexicana*. Thus, despite the fact that eugenic sterilization practices were not widely accepted in Mexico (in comparison to the United States), involuntary and/or compulsory sterilization was something to look up to.

Similarly to the role of women as caregivers and mothers, the responsibility to have oneself sterilized for the betterment of *la gran familia mexicana* and its future generations mostly relied on the individual. For instance, in the editorial section of October 1940, usually written by Alfredo Saavedra, it is stated that 'if we do a labour of persuasion by stimulating the reproduction of the good specimens for the prosperity of the people, we could recommend the *ultimate elimination* of inadequate procreators of the race' (Saavedra, 1940d, p. 2, my italics). Thus, in their view, the management and control of those who were able to reproduce would—by definition—exclude those undesirable genes (which in this case eugenicists mean sex workers, people with disabilities, criminals, alcoholics, homosexuals, indigenous and Black people, among others) from the *gran familia mexicana*. Additionally, the editorial section stated that this was not the only way of keeping undesirable genes out of mestizaje but, in the MSE's view, it was imperative for citizens to 'voluntarily get sterilized as [Mexicans] should be conscious of their paternity' (Saavedra, 1940d, p. 2). Thus, children also had a responsibility to the collective to know who their parents were and atone for their hereditary traits. The implication was that if they were aware of having undesirable parentage, they would have to make the decision to sterilize themselves. However, the MSE identified other cases that called for an 'imposition in the cases in which the laws deem necessary that the subject is capable of damaging the collective' (Saavedra, 1940d, p. 2). Therefore, according to eugenicists, 'it must always be present that society should not be subordinate to the individual as the social good [had] to be more important than all individual conveniences' (Saavedra, 1940d, p. 2). This seems the point of convergence in which the nuclear family connects to *la gran familia Mexicana* which, in the MSE's view, entails sacrificing one's own family and the continuation of the individual lineage for the good of the national family. Moreover, it can be seen from this quote that Mexican eugenicists considered what they would call persuasion—via educational campaigns and prenuptial clinics—as a way of advocating for the reproduction of desirable subjects while supporting the sterilization (voluntary or not) of those deemed undesirables. However, the goal of the MSE was to normalize the idea of volunteering oneself for eugenic sterilization as, in their view, the whole of Mexican society should regulate itself so those undesirable individual traits would cease to exist.

Who were the people who, according to the MSE, were not suitable to reproduce and therefore should be sterilized? Francisco Peña Trejo argued, following Galton, that sterilization should include 'all the people that due to their degenerative or hereditarian traits diverge from the average as they could be parents to an inadequate social descendance' (Peña Trejo, 1940, p. 8). He also mentioned that all those people deemed as undesirable parental figures would benefit from sterilization, and advocated for 'segregation (a negative system of colonization) for imbeciles, epileptics, people with a similar family background, physical and mental invalids, obligatory for dipsomaniacs, relapsing criminals, professional vagrants, and all people who [refused] to work' (Peña Trejo, 1940, p. 3). The usage of segregation as a 'negative system of colonization' requires attention. Generally, Mexico and other Latin American countries tended to pride themselves on not using forms of racial segregation, unlike the United States. Nonetheless, MSE members thought that there were some degenerative traits that no amount of change in

the environmental conditions could transform or eliminate their hereditary impact and therefore should not be part of *la gran familia mexicana*.

As it can be noted, the MSE advocated for an internal and biological system of colonization in which eugenicists would be in charge of managing the reproduction of Mexico. However, besides the groups mentioned above, sex workers were also deemed as undesirable subjects that should be sterilized. In the case of the sterilization law of Veracruz sex workers became fully pathological bodies that could no longer be redeemable in contrast with the abovementioned conception of fallen women. This can be seen in article number three of the sterilization law (Law 121) of 1932 in which it is stated that 'the state of criminals, alcoholics, prostitutes, and addicts in general [would] be investigated, proceeding in the same way with those individuals that [could] give way to poverty' (Law 121, Art. 3, 1932). Thus, the categorization of undesirable groups that had to be sterilized also intersected with class dynamics in post-revolutionary Mexico.

Due to the elite's concern to populate in the aftermath of the revolution, the prominent activities of sexual permissiveness, and the prominent role that the Catholic church still held in Mexico, for instance in the case of condemning eugenics and abortion—despite it being a secular state—there existed various discourses that advocated for eugenic sterilization while playing down its consequences. For example, in the editorial section of October 1940 it was expressed that 'eugenic sterilization does not mean castration or the suspension of sexual faculties, eugenic sterilization [consisted] on the technique of avoiding fertilization. This [was] done for the overall health of the working class' (Saavedra, 1940d, p. 2). As we can see, eugenicists seemed to imply that degeneration and disease mostly—or only—came from the working class. In the same section, they proceeded to mention that this was a very simple procedure that was advisable to all of those who were 'conscious of their degenerate hereditary background or sickness. It [was] also suitable for alcoholics or addicts, criminals, retards, imbeciles, and idiots' (Saavedra, 1940d, p. 2). This is to say, the construction of a rhetoric built on biological and hereditarian factors was intertwined with eugenic ideas to categorize who belongs to *la gran familia mexicana*.

1.3 | Final considerations

The idea of the *gran familia Mexicana* and the role of women played a pivotal role in the development and care of post-Revolutionary Mexico. DiGirolamo and Salgado de Snyder (2008) state that the family was 'considered the most important value in Mexican culture, and that the woman [was] the essential unifying element within the family' (DiGirolamo et al., 2008, p. 516). In this article it can be observed how science and eugenics were presented as a driving force for implementing different eugenically oriented plans for the maintenance of *la gran familia mexicana* using exclusionary notions of mestizaje as an organizing principle.

The standardisation of gendered roles inside of Mexican society through eugenics resulted in a normalization and management of sexuality that ranged from prenuptial certificates to sterilization measures and the institutionalization of eugenic ideas. This led to the advocacy of individual and state measures to regulate and control the *gran familia mexicana*. For instance, both feminists and male eugenicists carried out debates regarding motherhood, puericulture, class, and different preventive measures to keep undesirables at bay.

Through this article, I set the bases for understanding the links between eugenics and the making of *la gran familia mexicana*. These links showed the ways in which the eugenic regulation of individual families played into the creation of the national family and, thus, the Mexican nation-state. For instance, through the Mexican Code of Eugenics I was able to explore how the parameters set by eugenicists to achieve a "better reproduction" through assumed scientific language set to pathologize historically marginalized groups like people with disabilities, sex workers, "criminals", alcoholics, among many others. Similarly, through other eugenically sponsored activities like *La India Bonita* beauty pageant I was able to observe who were the individuals who were considered suitable to be part of *la gran familia*. Beauty Pageants, pre-nuptial certificates, Juvenile Courts, the standardization of child testing,

eugenic societies, laws, and institutions pretended to set the bases for which the individual was supposed to manage and control their own reproduction for the aim of a better nation state, or in this case, *a gran familia mexicana*.

To summarize, the goal of Mexican eugenics was to construct a set of eugenically oriented guidelines in which the individual and the nuclear family would regulate themselves to protect the collective, or as eugenicists called it, the *gran familia Mexicana*. A key aspect of my work is to argue that the point of convergence in which the nuclear family connects to *la gran familia Mexicana*, according to Mexican eugenicists, entails sacrificing one's own family and the continuation of the individual lineage for the good of the national family. This is to say, if Mexican individuals wanted to be a part of the *gran familia mexicana* they needed to accept eugenic precepts. This in turn, would become the organizing principle for a *gran familia mexicana* rooted in exclusionary notions dictated by class, gender, and 'race'.

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Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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